

St Mary's Church of England Infant School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	115711
Local Authority	Gloucestershire
Inspection number	326255
Inspection date	9 July 2009
Reporting inspector	Mary Harlow HMI

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

The registered childcare, managed by the governing body, was inspected under section 49 of the Childcare Act 2006.

Type of school	Infant
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	4–7
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	177
Government funded early education provision for children aged 3 to the end of the EYFS	0
Childcare provision for children aged 0 to 3 years	0
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Michael Cozens
Headteacher	Ann Fitzpatrick
Date of previous school inspection	24 May 2006
Date of previous funded early education inspection	Not previously inspected
Date of previous childcare inspection	Not previously inspected
School address	Bouncers Lane Prestbury Cheltenham GL52 5JB
Telephone number	01242 244054
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Age group	4–7
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and one additional inspector. They evaluated the overall effectiveness of the school and investigated in detail the following issues:

- standards in writing at the higher levels and the differences between boys' and girls' achievement in writing
- the effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage
- the way the school checks its own performance.

Evidence was gathered through classroom observations, work sampling, observation of an assembly, play and lunchtimes, and discussions with pupils, staff and governors. Other aspects of the school's work were not investigated in detail, but the inspectors found no evidence to suggest that the school's own assessments, as given in its self-evaluation, were not justified, and these have been included where appropriate in this report.

Description of the school

St Mary's Church of England Infant School is smaller than the average primary school. It is situated on the outskirts of Cheltenham and the majority of pupils come from the local community. Most pupils are of White British heritage and very few are learning English as an additional language. The percentage of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is below the national average. The majority of these pupils have moderate learning difficulties or behavioural problems. The school has achieved extended-school status and has gained accreditation as an Investor in People and for Healthy Schools. There is on-site private provision for after-school care, which some pupils attend. The headteacher is a consultant leader for other schools.

Key for inspection grades

Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Satisfactory
Grade 4	Inadequate

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

St Mary's is an outstanding school where 'nothing stands still'. Indeed, the school is successful in achieving its laudable aim to be 'a place where children can develop solid foundation skills and learning habits across a broad and balanced curriculum'. And they do so impressively. Inspectors agree with the overwhelming views of most parents, typified by these comments: 'St Mary's is an excellent school, with happy children, a great head and lovely staff who work very hard'; 'Our daughter has blossomed at St Mary's'; and 'My son has thrived.'

Pupils are increasingly starting school with some catching up to do, particularly in communication, language and literacy, and personal, social and emotional development. In the Reception classes, they get off to a good start and make good progress because of good quality teaching. Across Key Stage 1, because of outstanding provision, pupils make progress at a swift pace. By the end of Year 2, they achieve standards that are well above the national average in reading, writing and mathematics, and have done so for some time.

The school is quite rightly challenging more able pupils, particularly boys, to achieve at the higher levels in writing. The 2009 test assessments, coupled with the impressive range of writing seen in pupils' books and on display, show that the school is being successful. Standards are improving as a result of the excellent strategies implemented to inspire them to write creatively, such as the imaginative writing day stimulated by the discovery of dinosaur eggs in the school garden! Without exception, in all classes throughout the school, the presentation of pupils' work is of a high standard as careful attention is paid to the teaching of spelling, punctuation and handwriting. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities achieve exceptionally well because they receive skilled support and encouragement. Most pupils have well developed speaking and listening skills as a result of the wealth of opportunities provided for discussion, for example through 'talking partners', role play and drama activities.

Pupils' personal development and well-being are outstanding. All flourish in this vibrant, harmonious community because the school places high importance on developing their self-esteem. It does this superbly, and behaviour is exemplary as a result. The pupils move calmly and sensibly in class and cooperate extremely well in paired discussions and group tasks. Around the school, they invariably stand back for visitors and greet them with a warm, friendly smile. It was a delight to see pupils playing happily together using the 'huff and puff' equipment sensibly, watching the older children on duty at the 'friendship stop' taking their responsibilities seriously, and being entertained by an impromptu performance by three Reception children singing and acting out traditional rhyming songs.

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is excellent. Pupils benefit from a range of opportunities designed to cultivate these aspects; for example curriculum projects on Kenya and Poland and the excellent 'Dancing Cafe' initiative, instigated and led by the children, to raise funds for children less well off than them. Pupils also have good opportunities to learn French and Italian. The assembly observed, involving the adults acting out a bible story, which they did with great aplomb, was a fitting testament to the distinctive Christian ethos of the school. Such experiences are making a significant contribution to the children's spiritual development and their understanding of moral and ethical issues. Pupils demonstrate an excellent understanding of the importance of eating a healthy lunch and participating in exercise. They feel safe in school and several reported 'There is always a friend, or an adult, to turn to if someone is unkind.' Pupils are developing excellent basic academic and social skills that

prepare them extremely well for the next school and later life. They make a very strong contribution to their own school community and are encouraged to reach out to the local and global communities through a range of charitable activities and curriculum initiatives.

The quality of teaching and learning is outstanding. Planning and preparation are meticulous and imaginative teaching is rewarded by children's attentiveness, enthusiasm and hard work. Every effort is made to provide the children with practical, creative experiences which whet their appetite for learning, such as the visit to Warwick Castle. The application of literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology across all subjects is a real strength of the curriculum. Classrooms are full of vibrant displays of pupils' work in all subjects, such as the outstanding observational drawings of fruit by Year 2 children. Child protection procedures are well established. Risk assessment is robust and every care is taken to ensure the safety of the pupils.

The headteacher provides dynamic leadership. She is ably supported by an excellent senior management team. The school knows itself well and the children's needs are at the heart of decision making. An infectious team spirit permeates the school. All teachers with responsibilities for subjects or aspects of the school's work carry them out diligently. Documentation is impressive. The school's systems for checking on its improvements are rigorous and leaders at all levels, including governors, are focused relentlessly on raising standards. All are acutely aware of the school's strengths and aspects for improvement, and strive, with a steely resolve, to raise the bar even further. Evaluation is accurate and the improvement plan is an excellent tool to make the school even better. The governing body is outstanding. Members are extremely dedicated and they challenge and support the school in a sensitive manner.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

Good planning and teaching ensure the children in the Reception make good progress. Most reach, and some exceed, the goals expected of them by the end of the year. This is because there is an appropriately strong focus on linking sounds and letters and teaching basic mathematical skills. Most children write sentences independently, demonstrating a good grasp of capital letters and full stops. Several wrote three sentences and attempted to spell words such as 'shark' and 'starfish'. They solve problems confidently using numbers from 0 to 10 and collaborate sensibly when engaged in 'block' play. An excellent choice of suitable themes for learning ensures that the children are motivated. This was typified by the work observed on 'the seaside' where the children produced some impressive models of treasure chests and boats. Several used rich vocabulary as they acted out 'Hatty and Tatty' stories confidently and with great enjoyment. One child said as she went into a role-play activity, 'I'm Hatty and I am going to wear shiny, red goggles!' In lessons, the children move around the classroom confidently and calmly, fully aware of the daily routines. They play and work well together and are happy to pursue their own learning interests independently. They are keen to talk and share their learning with visitors and they do so with pride. The outdoor area is well resourced and is used effectively to promote children's confidence, independence and physical development. Nonetheless, adults do not always do enough to ensure the children are supported effectively at all times when learning outdoors. Support staff and other adults who volunteer their time contribute well to children's personal, social and emotional development. This is outstanding. All staff keep a very close check on each child's progress and assessment is regular and rigorous. The recent good improvements made to the classrooms are enabling the seamless integration of indoor and outdoor learning for the children.

What the school should do to improve further

- Restructure the deployment of adults in the Early Years Foundation Stage to ensure they support the children's outdoor learning more effectively.

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Annex A

Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	School Overall
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Overall effectiveness

How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?	1
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well being?	1
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	1

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

How effective is the provision in meeting the needs of children in the EYFS?	2
How well do children in the EYFS achieve?	2
How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the children in the EYFS?	1
How effectively are children in the EYFS helped to learn and develop?	2
How effectively is the welfare of children in the EYFS promoted?	2
How effectively is provision in the EYFS led and managed?	2

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	1
The standards ¹ reached by learners	1
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	1
How well learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make progress	1

¹Grade 1 - Exceptionally and consistently high; Grade 2 - Generally above average with none significantly below average; Grade 3 - Broadly average to below average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

Personal development and well-being

How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1
The extent to which learners enjoy their education	1
The attendance of learners	2
The behaviour of learners	1
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	1
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	1

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of learners' needs?	1
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	1
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	1

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	1
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	1
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	1
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	1
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	1
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	1
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	1
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	No
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No

Annex B**Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection**

9 July 2009

Dear Pupils

Inspection of St Mary's Church of England Infant School, Gloucester, GL52 5JB

I am writing to say thank you very much for giving us such a warm welcome during our recent visit to St Mary's Church of England Infant School. We were impressed with the way you greeted us so courteously with lovely, friendly smiles. We enjoyed talking with you about your work, watching the excellent 'wake and shake' session and observing your lovely stately dance performances. Your school is outstanding in many ways. Here are some of the special things that it does very well indeed:

- Your school looks after you exceptionally well and the adults want to do their best for you. Consequently, your personal development is excellent.
- Your behaviour and attitudes to learning are outstanding. Everyone in the school cares for each other superbly.
- In Reception, you get off to a good start in all aspects of your learning; you make excellent progress in all other classes and achieve very high standards by the time you leave Year 2.
- Your teachers plan exciting trips and challenging activities for you, which help you to enjoy school and develop a love of learning.
- The presentation of your written work is excellent.
- There are lots of clubs and visits, which you participate in enthusiastically. You contribute well to the local community and care for those who are less well off than you.
- You have such a dedicated headteacher, fantastic adults and committed governors at your school. We have asked them to make sure the younger children are supported a little more in their outdoor play and learning.

It was a real privilege to visit your school. Keep up the excellent work and, most importantly, continue to enjoy your learning.

Best wishes for the future. We hope that you achieve great things!

Yours faithfully

Mrs M Harlow

Her Majesty's Inspector